



ELSA newsletter 5: What makes you feel good?

If your household is anything like mine, emotions are often running high right now! Living in close confinement with our families, not having our normal opportunities to socialise and exercise, and trying to juggle a very different lifestyle means that emotions are heightened and we have no outlet outside the home. As parents and carers, we are trying to reassure our children and help them manage their emotions, while sometimes struggling with our own. For both adults and children, it is useful to know what your own coping strategies are. What are the things that make YOU feel better when you are sad, stressed, frustrated or exhausted? What helps your child feel good?



It is useful to actually write these down as a list (or children often like to draw it as a toolkit), so you can remind yourself of what will help you. If I'm on the verge of losing my temper and my husband tries to help by suggesting I need to go for a run, it will probably just make me feel more cross! But if I look at my list stuck inside the cupboard door, it reminds me that there ARE things that will make me feel better and I do have a choice.

Children may like to have an actual box that they keep their calming activities in. This might contain a favourite book, photo of a favourite place, special toy, playdough, bubbles, colouring, bubble wrap, squeeze toys, hand lotion so they can massage their hands, scrap paper to scribble on or tear up, or visual reminders of a calming breathing technique (e.g. [breathing star](#)) or glitter bottle (watch my video about glitter bottles here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNz57eB-kWo>), or anything else that helps!



Make sure you plan your list or soothing box at a time when things are calm, not when people are already tense. Everyone has different things that help them cope, but try to think of something for each of these categories:

Physical



Exercise can calm us when we are angry, and boost our mood if we feel low. Although we're more restricted than normal, what physical activities make you and your child feel good? Even just putting on a favourite song and jumping up and down to it can really help. Do stamping, star-jumps, press-ups, trampolining, keepy-uppies, dancing, punching a pillow, running, walking or cycling help?

Relaxation

Having a calming breathing technique that works for you is helpful as you can use it any time or place. Help your children try these four different techniques:

[Square breathing](#) ; [Finger breathing](#) ; [Lazy 8 breathing](#) ; [One to the sun breathing](#).

Which one do they (and you) find they like best? Write it on their toolkit.

Tensing and relaxing muscles, for example by scrunching your hands into fists and pulling your shoulders up to your ears, then shaking them out, is another quick way to ease tension.

Creative



What creative activities do you or your child enjoy, that help you cope? Drawing, painting, playdough, knitting, lego, woodwork, writing stories, sewing, playing an instrument or coding are all absorbing activities that will calm your mind.

Quiet

It can be hard to each have a quiet space, especially if children are sharing a bedroom, but try to find somewhere that they know they can go undisturbed. Explain that it's ok for children and adults to have quiet time if they need it, and that walking away from a situation that's upsetting you is a good strategy. What is your household's sign that someone doesn't want to be disturbed? Explain it to everyone and make sure it's respected.



In that quiet space, what activities help? Reading, looking at a glitter bottle, shutting your eyes and imaging a time and place you love?

Focusing on what you can see, hear, feel right now can stop your mind racing.

People



When you're struggling, who are the people you could talk to/call/email/Zoom? Who cheers you up, rather than making you feel worse?

Who could your child talk to in your house, or how could they contact a friend if they need cheering up? What activities do they like to do as a family - board games, charades, baking together?

Recognising success

Whenever your child refers to their calming list, or uses their soothing box, praise them for using a coping strategy and ask how it made them feel. Add things to their list or box as they find new things they enjoy.

Let them see when you do something to make yourself feel calmer, so they learn that we all have big feelings but we can learn how to manage them.

I would love to see photos of your calming lists or boxes!

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